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Roots of Faith  
An Elegy





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# In Memory of

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To \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## ROOTS OF FAITH



# ROOTS OF FAITH

## AN ELEGY

BY

J. F. PHINNEY



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INSCRIBED  
To  
THE MEMORY OF  
THOMAS GRAY



### FOREWORD

Gray's Elegy is a standard classic in English literature, and will remain so while men have eyes for beauty, ears for music, and souls for pensive contemplation.

It makes a basic appeal to the silent grief that in spite of faith, philosophy, and hope, lies deep in the heart of every man at the ever present thought that the kindly Earth that bore us and fills us with purest essence of herself, must soon become the grave of human hopes and aspirations, with all the beauty, grace, and charm she gave us senses to enjoy.

But in spite of its literary charm, the famous poem is undoubtedly defective as an elegy in that it shows us only the material side of death and entirely pretermits the spiritual side, which, when we come to think of it, should be the dominant thought in an elegy written in a Christian church-yard in Christian England in a recent century of the Christian era.

The author of the Roots of Faith excepts to this

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view of death, and in marked contrast to Gray, gives us an elegy abounding in vision of the hereafter. He inscribes his poem to the memory of Thomas Gray, of whose Elegy he was a great admirer from his earliest boyhood, as stated in his introduction.

As to the literary merit of the new elegy, there can be no question. In it the reader will find as strong and graceful lines as any in Gray, and, what is essential, a far better philosophy.

In spite of the deep faith that pervades the poem, it sounds a pensive chord as the author becomes the elegist of his lost youth; but even here he strikes a common chord dear to the heart of the race.

As a memorial offering for the bereaved, it is thought this elegy will prove an acceptable gift to those that mourn.

THE PUBLISHERS

## INTRODUCTION

For ten score years the beauty of thy verse  
Hath charmed the English people by its grace;  
Millions have heard thy *Elegy* rehearse  
The bell that tolls the knell of all the race.

In boyhood's day I made thy poem mine,  
And hung upon the visions that it holds;  
And I have never read a sweeter line  
Than, "Drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds".

Anon, a lovelorn youth upon the mead,  
Mutt'ring my wayward fancies I would rove,  
Solaced by lines that did befit my need,  
Culled from the verses of this treasure-trove.

In man's estate, lured by Ambition's call,  
I listened for some precept that would save,  
And heard thy timely message warning all,  
"The paths of glory lead but to the grave".

But when, in afternoon, I sought thy rhyme,  
To glean some comfort for my fleeting span,  
No solacement was there for speeding time;  
No compensation for the race I ran.

A little mound to designate my bier;  
A marking-stone to show I walked the earth!  
A patch of turf to supplicate a tear;  
A bit of moss the measure of my worth!

A hapless journey through this vale of tears  
If we become the clay our feet have spurned;  
A fruitless pilgrimage of weary years  
If animated souls to dust are turned.

And so the tuneful measure thou hast made,  
With mortal sentiment is sadly marred:  
“ Each in his narrow cell forever laid ”  
Forbids attainment of the soul’s reward.

As thee, so me, this hallowed place inspires  
To meditate on Earth’s illusive glare,  
And ponder on the portent of desires  
That cause our eyes to see this world so fair.

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Perish the thought that "in this spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;"  
Hearts are of substance, not of matter, made,  
Nor fated for a destiny so dire.

Nothing is laid in this neglected spot  
Except the vesture that the spirit wore;  
The earthy shroud that stamps the body's lot  
Does not enwrap the tenant gone before.

No song is left unsung by voices stilled  
To mortal ears; no poems left unwrit  
By those whose hands have dropped the pen once skilled  
To bring to Earth the fires in Heaven lit.

A little nearer to the aural sky,  
They seek a sweeter breath of purer air;  
And our sad pleadings for a time deny,  
To sing to keener ears a song more rare.

Dost think that yonder yokel, sowing seed,  
Doth stop to mourn the loss of goodly grain?  
Or that he feels the stress of present need,  
With harvest soon to fetch him greater gain?

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Did'st never mark the preacher at the bier  
Paint scenes of Paradise with rapture rife?  
Nor did thy spirit ever leap to hear,  
*"I am the resurrection and the life?"*

Methinks who would an elegy indite  
Must seize the end ere he essay the start;  
Lest he a fleeing shadow would invite  
To elude his grasp, in spite of all his art.

Again, meseems, that who would measure death  
Must die himself to deadly elements,  
And from the plane of life adjudge the breath  
That blights the soul, unless the heart repents.

How firmly to the ground the thought is wed  
Where scanty light on life beyond is shed;  
At eucharist by living bread we're fed,  
Yet soon our monuments declare us dead.

Some light we need to help our feeble hope,  
Some gleam of day while we in night abide;  
Someone with faith enough the door to ope,  
And show us somewhat of the other side.

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What means this fertile field of sculptured stones  
That rise defiant to the Reaper's scythe?  
The payment of these obligated loans  
To Earth absolves us from all further tithe.

Give back the cherished casket now left bare,  
The broken mould that once a jewel bore;  
The dreadful tribute that provokes despair  
Doth leave us richer than we were before.

Now Wisdom widens out her full design  
As semblance fails and substance comes to view;  
Where Reason ever stakes the moral line,  
And Liberty doth hold her markings true.

Whom Freedom fires, but Reason doth restrain,  
Shall freely walk where law doth not constrain;  
But unchained Freedom doth herself enchain,  
And Reason, trailing Freedom, trails her reign.

Call this, the broad, white way of garish stone  
That, seeming fair, deceives who walk thereon;  
But that, the narrow path of granite hewn,  
That leads us up to liberty anon.

How eagerly we suck our substance up  
From mother's breast, from garden, field, and plain;  
And when no longer we can hold the cup,  
How loath we are to lay it down again.

But wax for wane, a temple, spirit sown,  
Is slowly rising that defies decay;  
Whose superexcellence can not be shown  
Until the builder tear the veil away.

Is life dependent on a loaf of bread  
At cost of steady grind till back is bent?  
Immortal spirit like a stove be fed  
And fail when draft is wrong or fuel spent?

And shall we lean on what is less than we,  
Lay hold on matter to support the soul?  
Abhor the narrow house that makes us free,  
Prefer the larval state to final goal?

In mute rebuke all Nature doth protest:  
The moth that erst hath burst the dry cocoon,  
The vernal spring that breaks the cold's behest,  
The ebbing tide that turns at beck of moon.

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Poor Caterpillar, trailing through the mire,  
With painful progress stemming stick and stone,  
Endure thy lot, and wait thy new attire;  
A butterfly, thou'l soon for worm atone.

Despising then the barriers of earth,  
And winging lightly over bush and tree,  
Resplendent in the garb of thy new birth,  
Delight thee in a realm where thou art free.

If days that were shall some time come again,  
Abeyance hold in store some hidden link  
To bind us to the heartbeats that have been,  
With calm assurance we may near the brink,

Necessity alone would make us rise,  
As thistle-down doth fly its prickly bed;  
For who would brook the stings or bear the sighs  
That irk the pillow neath his weary head?

These days and years are but a phase of man,  
Whose course outcircles all the spheres of time.  
As comets dart athwart the starry span,  
So man through matter on his way sublime.

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Then let some fairer, fitter word than *death*  
Express the paradox of failing breath  
That brings us larger life; a word that hath  
Some prescient power to manifest our faith.

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### CEMETERY SYMBOLS

#### FORETHOUGHT

Come, friend, and let us in this sacred place  
The sculpture view, set here to symbolize  
The qualities of heart or mental grace  
That cannot buried be, but surely rise.

But some have used this cemetery plot,  
Unmindful of the purpose of the place,  
To bid defiance to their lowly lot  
By raising symbols that the heart abase.

That stately shaft erected there to strike  
The mind with import of its owner's power,  
Weighs little with the world's inborn dislike  
To honor wealth apart from mental dower.

And yonder sepulchre whose princely charge  
Commemorates a modern Croesus' sway,  
Is quite unnoticed by the world at large,  
Among whose billions he has passed this way.

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These crypts and vaults enwalled with artful care  
To stay the corse from mingling with the clay,  
Deny the claim of Nature to her share,  
And house the dead with those who live to-day.

And many urns about this place there be,  
To hold the little dust these souls have been ;  
But anything of worth that's left of me,  
Store not in urns, but in the hearts of men.

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### A LAMB

How fit the image of this sculptured lamb  
To symbolize the innocence that reigns  
In tender hearts, whose lives exhale a psalm  
Of praise from good that runs in children's veins.

This little grave that moistens Pity's eye,  
An infant form hath taken from our view;  
But could we see its spirit hov'ring nigh,  
'T were ample consolation for our rue.

In Paradise it blooms a fairer flower  
Than Earth's rank soil would suffer it to grow;  
Divested of the clay's benumbing power,  
It revels in the joys that Angels know.

“ Their Angels do behold my Father's face; ”  
He gently leads His lambs in pastures green;  
He shields them from the touch of who are base,  
Lest any these offend in what is mean;

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Until they gain the stature of a man,  
Untainted with the virus of the race,  
In gardens where the tree is under ban  
Whose mortal fruit hath rendered all men base.

What profit then to tarry in this night  
Where each is channel for ancestral ills?  
But bar the floodgates by an early flight,  
And everlasting health the current fills.

### AN ANCHOR

And here, a youth passed out of Nature's sway,  
While still enchanted with her wondrous spell,  
To waken to the soul's eternal day,  
Unsaddened by the sound of tolling knell.

But as he went he took his Father's hand,  
And walked the fearsome valley not alone;  
So sure his footsteps on the border-land,  
His parents cut this anchor in the stone.

Better to pass in morning's early glow,  
When skies are tinted with resplendent hue,  
Than wait awhile and watch the colors go,  
While leaden clouds supplant the matin view;

Or ere one loses childhood's faith in man,  
Or penetrates the specious mask he wears;  
Yea, forced the evils in himself to scan,  
And mark his soul o'ergrown with ancient tares.

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There's reason for the Reaper's early call:

To save the stalk from some impending blight,  
Or garner it ere stress of season fall  
And plunge it helpless into hopeless plight.

Some gladness still is thine of thy brief stay:

The vernal beauty of the world at dawn,  
The glow of fervent life that filled thy day,  
Illusion sweet ere spell of youth is gone.

From mine own checkered years I cannot see

What loss thou hast sustained, if loss there be,  
But something gained; for thou has not, like me,  
Wept ruthless Time, that bears me far from thee.

Might I with thee my haunting visions lay;

The pleasant past in present practice hide!  
But now a cloudless morn beclouds my day;  
A ruddy wraith is ever at my side.

Ah, glory time! exultant, joyous youth,

That mantles vision with mirage so fair —  
Till time dispel the sheen with little ruth —  
Terrific loss! my soul lies captive there.

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A sadder dirge than that of death I sing,  
Whose poignant pangs the passing years allay ;  
But this, the fleeting days no respite bring,  
And greater grows the grief as dies the day.

Remains of happy states are all we own,  
And these, receding, fill the soul with fears  
That what the future brings may not atone  
For what has vanished with the passing years.

Fail ! childhood, boyhood, adolescence, prime,  
And fall ! enchanting castles of each state ;  
The years of blighted faith have had their time,  
And hopeless hunger is become our fate.

### AN ANGEL

When Wisdom's edict set this maid apart,  
The sculptor caught her image as she sped,  
And poised it by the magic of his art  
To brood in silence o'er the fleeting dead.

But now she speaks, and hark to what she saith:  
"Chide not the love that bears thy love away,  
The way of life is through the portal, death;  
The grave is victor only for a day.

"Return-to-dust is not the fate of man,  
The chaff from wheat is winnowed with the fan;  
To close the scene before it scarce began  
Were useless labor on a worthless plan.

"No souls are captive in these vacant cells,  
Remains of men are only empty shells.  
The prisons are the senses of the flesh;  
The jailers, carnal joys that souls enmesh.

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“ The times and seasons of our passage hence  
Are ordered by unerring Providence;  
The working law of these determinants —  
Our uses, here or there, as best events.

“ Some men are buried here whose tombs I face,  
Who merely slumbered in their day of grace;  
O'er their remains I might with reason weep,  
Since, passing hence, they never wake from sleep.

“ Cease here thy grief for lives departed, then,  
While living tombs e'er walk abroad as men;  
The dead are they who never lift the eye  
Nor bow the knee to God, the Lord most high.

“ As useless are these stones for those who die,  
As idle pining for our youth so fleet,  
Whose memory still detains us with a sigh  
And holds our thought in thralldom more than meet.

“ And yet the record of their journeyed miles  
May profit you, who, still above the sod  
Now scan the scripture on these marble piles,  
To lift your hearts in gratitude to God.

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“ Why cling to that which ever thee misled —  
A faulty nature that must be repressed ?  
With leanness fares the flesh on longing fed  
Where Ten Commandments bar the avid breast.

“ But strive for what will bring thee pure delight —  
The will to wish for what thou may’st attain  
Where wants are legal, their enjoyment right,  
And impulse freely acted leaves no stain.

“ Employ the time to loose thee, not to bind,  
And walk in freedom by thy native right ;  
Command the earth as vassal to the mind,  
Nor weight thy shoulders to impede thy flight.”

### THE SWORD

“ With heavy heart we seek a fitting word,  
Or pen a paean at the soldier’s bier;  
The Lord rebuked the spirit of the sword  
When Peter smote the high-priest servant’s ear.

“ Who takes the sword shall perish with the sword;”  
Fair Justice ever renders what we give.  
The lust of killing we can ill afford;  
The saber slays the love by which we live.

“ Thou shalt not kill.” Nor person, law, nor state  
Can abrogate Jehovah’s fixed decree;  
Love’s world may not be sacrificed to hate;  
Mankind with cosmic law must yet agree.

The Superman hath brought upon his pate  
The blow he aimed to subjugate a world;  
Indignant nations razed the rampant state  
Whose armies at the rights of man were hurled.

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What time strong nations set upon their prey,  
The set-upon bid fair to pass away;  
But strength to weakness turns when used to slay;  
The prey remains; the conquerors decay.

There is a righteous war that all should wage  
Who fain would see the end of deadly strife;  
A war against the lusts that in us rage,  
And cause our feet to miss the path of life.

The “seven nations mightier than thou”  
That Moses led the people forth to smite,  
Are seven racial sins to which we bow,  
And turn our hearts from doing what is right.

Hence wars will ever devastate the earth  
While men refuse the bidding of the Word;  
As automatic instruments of wrath,  
The nations purge each other with the sword.

Until our swords we into plowshares beat,  
Until our spears to pruning-hooks we turn,  
No alien light our eyes shall ever greet,  
No alien hearth for us shall ever burn.

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The proud of heart must ever aliens be,  
Their septic substance vitiates their thought.  
Of finer frame themselves they seem to see,  
For them the common mould was cast for naught.

Ere thou condemn thy brother's chosen stand,  
First cast the beam from out thy evil eye;  
Then second thought will stay thy eager hand,  
And second sight refuse to see him die.

My evils bring my brother's to the light;  
In him I see the faults that in me lie;  
A cleaner will would bring to clearer sight  
Some virtues which my eyes do not descry.

The enemy? A bogey of the mind,  
Conceived in hate and fed on haunting fear;  
The remedy? A love of human kind  
Will slay the ghost and let the friend appear.

A man's own household — there shall be his foes,  
Nor seek elsewhere the enemy to find;  
Within himself the cause of all his woes —  
The falsities and evils of his mind.

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To fight my evils in another man  
Is pleasant justice and delightful hate;  
'T were wiser judgment and a saner plan  
To fight myself; and not embroil a state.

From calm reflection I most surely know  
That I have never suffered half from men  
That I have done to me. My fiercest foe  
Is I. Let truth the foul indictment pen.

We are epitomes of all the crimes  
That ran their courses in our fathers' veins,  
And mingled their convergent streams from times  
Before the flood. The serpent's venom reigns.

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### A BROKEN COLUMN

Did length of days suffice to make us ripe,  
Were time the tape to measure mortals by,  
Then would this broken column fitly type  
The life laid low while still its sun was high.

But he who looks from causes to their ends  
Dwells not with foolish blindness on effects ;  
The Mind that rules creation ever bends  
The means to suit the man as He elects.

Not ours to sweep horizons with the eye,  
And note what storms are brewing on the way ;  
What seems like chilling blast from which we die  
Is kindly wind that bears our bark to bay.

To quit the quest of prestige and of power ;  
To cease to seek dominion over men ;  
To leave the pleasant plaudits of an hour,  
Or shut the door on place that might have been :

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These not the signals of a broken life,  
But signs that shrines, which, erstwhile in the breast  
Bade one to consummate by ceaseless strife  
Unholy plans, were shattered for the best.

Spin not thy substance of such feeble stuff  
As merely to suffice for garment here;  
But try to make thy texture firm enough  
To mantle thee where qualities appear.

Nor take the course of earth-deluded man  
Who, lured by seeming through the outer sense,  
Doth stake his fields and lay his specious plan  
In self-delusion till he passes hence;

But emulate the sane and clear of sight,  
Who walk the earth with eyes on Heaven bent  
Where love is motive, and its truth is might,  
And each is agent of the Lord's intent.

### A CROSS ON SHAFT

With quiet grandeur does this granite pile,  
Surmounted by the cross of Olivet,  
Stand guard above the grave of one whose dial  
Cast fifty suns before her own had set.

In morning's bud, in after-morning's bloom,  
Adown the gentle current of the stream,  
A child, a maid, a woman at the loom,  
She wove the precious fabric of her dream.

A dream of him whose complemental soul  
Would fill her own with fullness of delight;  
Whose voice were blessing, and whose smile the whole  
That earth could offer to her raptured sight.

Capricious years brought gladness in their train  
To favored souls on whom shy Hymen beams,  
But bore no tidings of her fancied swain,  
Nor filled her cup with vintage of her dreams.

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For dreaming is the refuge from the thrall  
That locks the spirit in its house of clay;  
A welcome egress in the prison-wall  
Through which the inmate sallies forth to play.

Is cheated nature to be starved for aye,  
And miss the very purpose of its plan?  
An inborn dictate stoutly whispers, " Nay;  
Eternal sex is God's great gift to man."

But if, in Time, the Stars be indisposed  
To grant what basic rights inhere in each,  
Then faith impels that when their reign is closed  
Our hearts' desires will be within our reach.

What hours of pensive yearning filled thy day,  
Thy soul to his in closer union drew;  
He might have frowned at times, thou turned away;  
But now his sight is clear; thy heart is true.

Oh, blessed realm, where ends the ardent quest,  
Wherein the heart no more shall vex the head,  
And where, look north or south, turn east or west,  
Their eyes shall ever meet whose souls are wed;

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Where Yesterday no more shall mar To-day,  
Nor Morrow mock us with a fading hope;  
A perfect Present there shall hold her sway,  
Nor Past nor Future with the Now elope.

### GATES AJAR

Pause now a moment by these gates-ajar,  
Through which a sainted mother lately passed;  
For many stages she had journeyed far,  
And gladly reached the threshold of the last.

In youth's fair blush she took the bridal veil,  
And fearless faced what fortune held in store:  
Resolved she would not blasted hopes bewail,  
But cling to God and husband all the more.

And she had need of all her fortitude  
To bear whatever burdens came her way;  
And meet with noble courage all the brood  
Of puzzling problems that arose each day.

For children's wants are many, and their griefs  
Too great for any but a mother's care;  
Their questions of such import as the briefs  
Of lawyers scarce suffice to posit fair.

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Before the sun his daily round doth start,  
The mother at her morning task is found ;  
Long after his receding rays depart,  
Unfinished yet, her hands with work abound.

For love of him whose soul her children take —  
In outer setting hers as gems in gold —  
She gives herself in labors for their sake,  
And finds a Heaven in service to her fold.

As true as Vestal virgins feeding fire  
Whose constant flame held sure the Roman sway,  
Our mothers' faithful vigils never tire,  
That sons may bases of our empires lay ;

While daughters rear the structure of the home  
Which underlies the fabric of the state ;  
For nations hasten to their certain doom  
When virtues fail and homes disintegrate.

Then lay your tributes here of wreath and lyre  
O'er her whose loyal love the race doth bless ;  
Her destiny doth seal creative fire  
Within her breast, released by love's caress.

### A SHEAF OF WHEAT

If now you ask, "Why stands this sheaf of wheat  
Above the mortal part of this old man?"  
Then know no other symbol were so meet  
To tell the story of the course he ran.

A child of vision on his native hills,  
He saw the hidden landscape fancy weaves,  
And caught the mystic melody of rills,  
The meaning of the sigh that stirs the leaves.

Oft would he steal away from noisy crowds  
And gain the wood to which the upland leads;  
To watch the angels riding on the clouds  
Whose shadows chased each other o'er the meads.

The hills his inspiration and delight,  
Nor cared he for the toil that brought him there;  
Enough for him to stand and view the sight  
Of distant mountains dim in azure air.

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Thus early up the hillside did he wend,  
Prophetic of his climb in after years;  
For soon must he the mount of faith ascend  
By ways bemoaned with prayers, bedewed with tears.

E'en in the church-yard he was wont to go,  
As if communing with the unseen dead;  
Perchance the trumpet might that moment blow  
And rouse the sleepers from their lowly bed.

Yet not all vision, not all dreams was he,  
But early learned to use the spade and hoe;  
Among the harvesters he loved to be,  
And rake the meadows where the mowers go.

Full often in the wheat-fields he was seen  
To help the reapers gather in the grain —  
An earnest of his subsequent demean —  
To labor free for others he would fain.

Yet he who gives too freely of his store,  
Will know some little lack for all his care;  
For many take, but few repay the score,  
Convinced that greed will further better fare.

Did all men give as freely as receive,  
    No need of human good would ever fail;  
And greater gifts impel them to believe  
    In Him who sends the manna and the quail.

We are not quick to claim the higher right  
    To practice what is best for human weal;  
Our blindness to the Word's revealing light  
    Is from our deafness to the truth's appeal.

For truth's not truth that strikes alone the eye,  
    But enters not the will to establish sway;  
The lightning's flash reveals the will on high;  
    The thunder's crash commands us, "hear, obey!"

His after years? A larger type of these.  
    In youth the courses of the stream are laid;  
The flood of years a deeper channel sees;  
    The plashing brook — a river, placid, staid.

Full many a mind aglow with vision keen  
    Must wait for Time to place the halo there;  
Full many a man be bound to labor mean,  
    That work well done may make the world more fair.

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A child, he took Jehovah at his word;  
A youth, unfurled the banner of the Lord;  
In manhood, on his evils drew the sword;  
In age, a peaceful spirit his reward.

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Some closing words let kindly Nature speak:  
“We loved each other and I miss him sore;  
He left the haunts of men my own to seek,  
And there was wont to worship and adore.

“Think not that he to men felt slightly bound —  
His life a record of the love he bore —  
But in my face a truer mirror found  
Of his Creator, whom he loved the more.

“Full well he knew that if my face is marred  
With beast and reptile, weed and noxious plant,  
The fault is not of God, but man, who, scarred  
By sin, hath sowed his germs through earth’s extent.

“ For I am outer setting to the mind ;  
My living forms are shapes of thought and will ;  
True symbol of the soul of human kind ;  
Unerring type of every good and ill.

“ Unconscious of their guilt, these mortals ask,  
‘ Why stinging insects ? Why these poison plants ? ’  
I am what mortals make me ; wear no mask  
Of pleasant face to cover false pretense.

“ Would’st banish from my face what doth offend ?  
Then banish from thy thought what mars thy own ;  
And I will to thy better thinking lend  
My hand to fructify what thou hast sown.

“ But shun the great delusion that the dust  
Possessed a will to grow, whereby it must  
A plasma have induced, which, from its lust  
Evolved a man to crown the cosmic crust.

“ Be wise in time. Beware the earth’s allure,  
Nor set your heart upon a transient loan ;  
To put your faith in what cannot endure,  
Will find you faithless when I claim my own.

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## ROOTS OF FAITH

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“ A man’s essential life is not from me.  
Embodyed in a substance not his own,  
He labors from his burden to be free  
And liberate his mind in matter sown.

“ In God’s great plan I lay the Primal scene;  
Give man a body and an earth as well;  
His spirit lays its course in my demesne:  
The vestibule of Heaven and of Hell.”













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